

Iron Road to the West

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Book Reviews

Averell was subsequently removed from command by General Philip Sheridan, a controversial action which crushed Averell psychologically. General Sheridan, according to a secondhand report uncovered by the editors, later regretted this action. Averell's dismissal, an event too painful to recall himself, cut short his original intention to extend his memoirs through 1865. An account of this time in Averell's life is detailed in the editors' epilogue as is Averell's post-military career as an inventor, entrepreneur, and consul-general to British North America at Montreal.

The editors of *Ten Years in the Saddle*, Nicholas J. Amato and Edward K. Eckert, have explained Averell's removal this way: "William Averell was not a failure during the Civil War; he was a victim of change. He had been just what the Army needed early in the conflict—disciplined, capable, and cautious." The editors should also be complimented for letting Averell tell his story in his own words. They have changed little of Averell's typewritten text and have skillfully focused their attention on the manuscript's readability and accuracy. In doing so they have provided us with a valuable document of Civil War history.

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Iron Road to the West, by John Stover. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978. pp. xii, 266. \$14.95.

John Stover is no stranger to transportation history. Indeed, he has produced eight books on the subject; *Iron Road to the West* is the latest. Like those before it, this volume is clearly an important contribution to the literature.

Stover's thesis is that "no decade was more important in the history of American railroads than the antebellum 1850s." (p. xi) He points out that the railroads of that decade forged a new east-west trade axis; that along with improved implements, railroad transportation served to advance the farmer's frontier and foster the development of western commercial agriculture; that railroads facilitated an accelerated exchange of food for manufactured goods; that the rails provided adequate periodicity on a year-round basis; and that they resulted in the rise of Chicago as queen among aspiring western cities. Moreover, this modern, new transportation device contributed to the passing of the

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older merchant capitalism and to the emergence of a national economy centered more on domestic rather than foreign trade. Finally, Stover asserts, these arteries forged a political, economic, and cultural alliance between the Northwest and the states of the Old Northwest—an extremely important fact in view of the coming Civil War.

Stover's chapters deal with the railroads at midcentury; with them in the various geographic sections of the country during the 1850s; with their victories over road, canal, and steamboat; with various technical advances; and with them on the eve of the war. Most of his information comes from a rich lode of secondary sources; the book's great contribution derives from the author's brilliant synthesis of that material. Inevitably, a great body of data and factual information has found its way into each chapter. Just as inevitably, this has made for dry narrative. Yet such material is the warp and woof of any historical analysis.

Iron Road to the West is essential reading for any serious student of American railroad and economic history as well as for those who would seek to understand the broad fabric of the nation in that crucial era immediately prior to the Civil War. General readers and rail buffs also will profit from the book.

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To God Be the Glory: The Mennonite Witness in Iowa City, 1927-1977, by Gordon M. Miller. Iowa City: First Mennonite Church of Iowa City, 1977. pp. 177. Illustrations, bibliography, notes. No price paper.

To God Be the Glory is a history of the first fifty years of the Mennonite congregation in Iowa City written as part of an anniversary celebration. As such, the book is addressed primarily to the Mennonite membership, but Miller consciously avoids a frequent pitfall of local historians who ignore the larger historical context in which their subjects acted. In his foreword, Miller states that he is attempting "where possible, to make notation of how outside events affected the life and actions of the congregation." (p. 5) This he does. The book is a well-documented chronology of the struggle of a small mission through the financial crisis of the 1930s and the war years.

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